

Message Text

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PAGE 01 COLOMB 00557 151214Z

20

ACTION PM-04

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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 557

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, CE

SUBJ: SHIP VISITS TO SRI LANKA

REF: 74 COLOMBO 3099, (DTG 061030Z NOV 74)

1. SUMMARY: ALTHOUGH EMBASSY BELIEVES POLICY FOR US NAVY SHIP VISITS TO COLOMBO SET FORTH IN REFTEL IS STILL GENERALLY SOUND RECENT CHANGES IN POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT IN SRI LANKA AS WELL AS SPECIAL EVENTS SCHEDULED IN COMING YEAR OR SO HAVE LED US TO RE-EXAMINE SITUATION. WE CONCLUDE THAT, IN ORDER INSURE CONTINUED ACCESS TO PORT OF COLOMBO, US NAVAL VISITS AT LEVEL OF 6-8 SHIP VISITS PER YEAR, RECOMMENDED IN PARA 9 REFTEL, SHOULD BE ADJUSTED DOWNWARD IN MONTHS AHEAD. NUMBER OF VISITS TO BE RELATED TO SUCH CONSIDERATIONS AS POLITICAL CLIMATE AND FREQUENCY AND TYPE OF SOVIET VISITS. EMBASSY ALSO RECOMMENDS NO VISITS IN PERIOD BETWEEN JUNE AND SEPT 1976 BECAUSE OF AUGUST NON-ALIGNED SUMMIT IN COLOMBO. FURTHER, WE SHOULD BE PREPARED TO LIMIT VISITS DURING PRE-ELECTION PERIOD IN EARLY 1977 DEPENDING ON POLITICAL SITUATION AT THAT TIME. END SUMMARY.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 COLOMB 00557 151214Z

2. FOLLOWING EXPULSION OF TROTSKYITES FROM COALITION GOVERNMENT IN SEPT 1975, TROTSKYITE LEADERS PUBLICLY ATTACKED GOVT OF SRI LANKA'S (GSL) WILLINGNESS TO APPROVE VISITS BY US NAVY SHIPS AT TIME OF LATE OCT-EARLY NOV VISITS BY THREE US NAVAL SHIPS. THIS WAS FIRST TIME SINCE GOVT TOOK OFFICE IN MAY 1970 THAT ISSUE HAS BEEN RAISED OPENLY. TROTSKYITES WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY CONTINUE SUCH ATTACKS. RESULT CAN ONLY BE GREATER SENSITIVITY TO SHIP VISITS BY BANDARANAIKE GOVERNMENT ALTHOUGH GOVT, INCLUDING PRIME MINISTER, SEEM WILLING TO DEFEND APPROVALS UP TO POINT, (75 COLOMBO 3512).

3. ADDITIONAL COMPLICATING FACTOR IS OSTENSIBLE IMBALANCE IN 1975 OF NUMBER OF US AND SOVIET SHIP VISITS UP TO DECEMBER 1975 WHEN EIGHT US SHIPS IN SIX VISITS HAD CALLED AT COLOMBO AS COMPARED TO TWO SOVIET SHIPS IN TWO VISITS. BALANCE WERE REDRESSED TO SOME EXTENT BY VISITS OF FOUR SOVIET VESSELS IN FOUR VISITS IN DECEMBER (COLOMBO 117). US IS PLACED IN DISADVANTAGEOUS POSITION BECAUSE OF DIFFERENCES IN US AND SOVIET NAVAL PRESENCES, TYPES OF SHIPS AND OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS. DIFFERENCE GIVES IMPRESSION TO UNSOPHISTICATED CEYLONSE THAT ALMOST ALL US VISITS ARE BY COMBATANTS WHILE OVERWHELMING NUMBER OF SOVIET SHIPS ARE OSTENSIBLY QUASI-CIVILIAN, I.E. SPACE VEHICLE RECOVERY SHIPS OR RESEARCH VESSELS. ALTHOUGH EMBASSY RECOGNIZES COMPARISON IS MISLEADING, BALANCE IN TERMS OF FREQUENCY OF VISITS AND TYPES OF VESSELS IS ADDITIONAL FACTOR WHICH GSL WILL WATCH AND BE SENSITIVE TO.

4. FUTURE EVENTS WHICH ADD TO DELICACY OF PROBLEM ARE NON-ALIGNED SUMMIT SCHEDULED FOR COLOMBO IN AUGUST 1976 AND CEYLONSE GENERAL ELECTIONS SCHEDULED TO BE HELD NO LATER THAN MAY 1977. TROTSKYITES HAVE ALREADY OPENED ATTACKS ON PRIME MINISTER BANDARANAIKE'S NON-ALIGNED CREDENTIALS CHARGING THAT TROTSKYITES' EXPULSION FROM GOVT, GSL'S SWITCH TO MORE PRAGMATIC

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 COLOMB 00557 151214Z

ECONOMIC POLICIES AND PM'S REFUSAL TO ADOPT RADICAL POSTURE ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES PROVES SHE HAS SOLD OUT TO "AMERICAN IMPERIALISTS."

5. AFTER CONSIDERING THESE FACTORS AND ASSUMING US INTERESTS ARE BEST SERVED BY PRESERVING ACCESS TO COLOMBO FOR LONGER TERM, EMBASSY RECOMMENDS FOLLOWING ADJUSTMENTS TO PREVIOUS SHIP VISIT POLICY CONTAINED

REFTEL AND REQUESTS FORWARD PLANNING TAKE RECOMMENDATIONS INTO ACCOUNT:

A) NUMBER OF SHIP VISITS IN ONE YEAR SHOULD BE ADJUSTED DOWNWARD. ALTHOUGH WE REALIZE THAT PLANNING PROBLEMS ARE INVOLVED IF THE NUMBER OF VISITS PER YEAR ARE NOT SPECIFIED IN ADVANCE, AT THIS TIME WE DO NOT WANT TO SET NEW NUMERICAL LIMITS. INSTEAD, IN MONTHS IMMEDIATELY AHEAD, VISITS WILL HAVE TO BE RELATED TO SUCH CONSIDERATIONS AS POLITICAL CLIMATE HERE AND FREQUENCY AND TYPE OF SOVIET VISITS.

B) NO US NAVY SHIP VISIT SHOULD BE SCHEDULED FOR COLOMBO BETWEEN JUNE 1 AND SEPT 1, 1976.

C) DEPENDING UPON POLITICAL SITUATION DURING SRI LANKA'S PRE-ELECTION PERIOD, WE SHOULD BE PREPARED LIMIT US SHIP VISITS DURING EARLY 1977.

D) NUMBER OF SHIPS IN ANY ONE VISIT SHOULD NOT EXCEED TWO AND LESS OBSTRUSIVE VESSELS, I.E., DESTROYERS AND DESTROYER ESCORTS, SHOULD BE SCHEDULED IF POSSIBLE.

6. OTHER ASPECTS OF SHIP VISIT POLICY CONTAINED REFTEL, INCLUDING POLICY FOR SHIP VISITS TO MALDIVES, ARE NOT AFFECTED BY THIS MESSAGE.

7. EMBASSY BELIEVES ADOPTION OF ABOVE RECOMMENDATIONS WILL BE BEST WAY OF PROTECTING OUR LONGER TERM INTEREST IN MAINTAINING CONTINUED MEASURED ACCESS TO COLOMBO FOR US NAVY SHIP VISITS.

VAN HOLLEN

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